

Comet Ping Pong

Comet Ping Pong (often abbreviated as **Comet**) is a pizzeria restaurant and concert venue located on 5037 Connecticut Avenue NW in Chevy Chase, Washington, D.C., on Connecticut Avenue. Owned by James Alefantis, Comet has received critical acclaim from *The Washington Post*, *The Washingtonian*, *New York* magazine, the *DCist*, and Guy Fieri of Food Network's *Diners, Drive-Ins and Dives*. Comet is also noted for its ping-pong tables in the back rooms, as well as for the bands that sometimes perform there.

It was founded in 2006 by Alefantis and Carole Greenwood, who also co-owned a restaurant on the same block. Alefantis quickly became the sole owner of Comet Ping Pong after Greenwood, a chef at both restaurants, left her position as co-owner and executive chef of Comet. In 2008, the restaurant was involved in a disagreement with the area's **Advisory Neighborhood Commission** over the fact that Comet broke an agreement with ANC. The violation of the agreement, which stipulated that Comet not open after midnight and have live entertainment, led to a bitter dispute with the ANC, which resulted in Comet narrowly being able to remove its formal arrangement with ANC. In late 2016, the restaurant was the center of the debunked **Pizzagate conspiracy theory**, which resulted in hundreds of people harassing the restaurant's staff and is thought to have been the cause of a non-fatal shooting at the restaurant.

1 History

1.1 Founding and Carole Greenwood

Comet Ping Pong was originally founded by James Alefantis and Carole Greenwood in 2006. It was placed on the same block as another restaurant that they co-owned together, Buck's Fishing and Camping, so they could easily move back and forth between the locations.^[1] The restaurant met with initial success and was able to find a niche in the gourmet pizza market in the D.C. area.^[1] Greenwood served as the chef of both restaurants;^[2] she left her position as executive chef and co-owner in 2006 citing urgent family matters and other personal interests.^{[3][4]} The *Washington City Paper*'s Tim Carman felt that both Comet and Buck's Fishing & Camping had managed to succeed without Greenwood after her departure.^[5]

1.2 Conflict with the ANC

When Comet Ping Pong opened in 2006, Alefantis agreed with the local **Advisory Neighborhood Commission** (ANC) and the **Alcoholic Beverage Control Board** that the restaurant would not stay open past midnight and would not have live entertainment.^[6] By 2008, however, the restaurant was hosting live music events and some neighborhood residents complained that the business was open after midnight.^[6] Additionally, a member of the ANC criticized Alefantis for having placed a ping pong table on the sidewalk in front of the restaurant to attract and entertain customers.^[7] The ANC member, Frank Winstead, published a video on YouTube, "Ping Pong in Public Space", which showed people playing ping pong outside the restaurant and implied that the situation was a traffic hazard.^[7] Anticipating that he was going to request outside seating, Alefantis brought the table indoors.^[7]



Ping Pong games are played inside of the restaurant.

Alefantis held a meeting with the local ANC board to formally request that it recommend remove its formal arrangement so he could put in outside seating, have live entertainment in the restaurant, and remain open after midnight.^[6] The meeting was acrimonious, with some ANC members accusing Alefantis of violating the agreement and holding live entertainment in the venue. Winstead stated that Alefantis was, among other things, "trying to turn this area into **Adams Morgan** with the murders and rapes."^[6] The ANC decided in Comet's favor by a 4–3 vote and the audio recording of the meeting went public.^[8] Live music resumed on August 8, 2008, after the decision, and Winstead was defeated by a wide margin in the next election.^{[9][10]}

1.3 Pizzagate conspiracy theory and 2016 shooting

Main article: [Pizzagate conspiracy theory](#)

In early November 2016, several websites and online forums falsely implicated the restaurant and various Democratic Party figures as part of a supposed child trafficking ring, which was dubbed “Pizzagate” on Internet forums.^[11] The rumor was debunked by the Metropolitan Police Department of the District of Columbia, and sources such as [Snopes.com](#) and *The New York Times*, among others.^{[12][13][14]} However, the restaurant’s owners and staff were harassed, threatened on social media websites, and given negative [Yelp](#) reviews.^{[11][15]} After continued threats, Comet Ping Pong increased the security for concerts held inside its premises.^[16]

On December 4, 2016, Edgar Maddison Welch of Salisbury, North Carolina, walked into the restaurant with a semi-automatic rifle, and fired at least one shot inside the building before being arrested; no one was injured.^{[14][17]} In addition to the AR-15 style rifle, police seized a Colt .38 caliber handgun, a shotgun, and a folding knife from Welch’s car and person.^[14] Welch told police that he planned to “self-investigate” the conspiracy theory,^[14] and was charged with assault with a dangerous weapon, carrying a pistol without a license, unlawful discharge of a firearm, and carrying a rifle or shotgun outside the home or business.^[18]

In response to the shooting, the restaurant set up a [GoFundMe](#) campaign to compensate for additional security, lost wages, and property damage.^[19] On Facebook, a local resident set up an event to support the restaurant and nearby businesses affected by the harassment campaign, which thousands of people expressed interest in attending.^{[20][21]}

2 Services and reputation



The band French Letter performs in Comet Ping Pong’s back room

Comet Ping Pong is both a pizzeria and a live concert

venue. *The Washington Post*’s food critic, Tom Sietsema, gave Comet two and a half stars, noting that its pizzas “are as good for their thin and yeasty crusts as for their toppings.”^[22] *The Washingtonian* called the restaurant in the “top tier” of Washington pizzerias.^[23] *New York* magazine featured Comet in its “Where to Eat” section of a ‘Navigating the Potomac’ feature, describing the restaurant as a “hipster-heavy pizza parlor.”^[24] The *DCist* featured Comet Ping Pong’s ‘Time-Out’ pizza as one of the ten best in the area.^[25] The restaurant also appeared on an episode of Food Network’s *Diners, Drive-Ins and Dives* with Guy Fieri, where he called the Yalie clam and the Philly calzone pizzas some of the “best he’s ever had”.^{[26][27]}

GQ ranked James Alefantis as the 49th most powerful person in Washington partly on the basis of owning Comet Ping Pong and its cultural cachet.^[28] Ping pong tables populate the back room which serves as Comet’s concert venue, which features a stage at nearly ground level.^{[9][29]} A number of artists and bands have performed at the restaurant, including *The Apes*, *Speedy Ortiz*, and *Tussle*.^{[9][30][31]} *DCist*’s Mehan Jayasuriya noted of the venue, “It’s not often that, on your way into a punk rock show, you have to carefully skirt around the band members, for fear of interrupting their ping-pong match.”^[29]

3 References

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4 External links

- Official website

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5.1 Text

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